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ABSTRACT

Recognizing a student project of the month is one possible solution to the problem of motivating vocational agriculture students who are enrolled in supervised occupational experience programs. In small departments, a single winner could be selected; in departments with a large number of students, it is possible to select a winner in each class. Criteria for selecting a winner could vary according to the needs and priorities of the department. For example, the award could be given to the student with the highest grade for his or her recordbook or to the student selected by an advisory committee. Because high school-age students generally enjoy competition with their peers, the reward program should be a meaningful one, involving publicity and a material reward (such as a ribbon or medal). All facets of the project of the month competition could be sponsored. Potential sponsors include the local Future Farmers of America alumni affiliate, a local civic organization, or a local agricultural business. Besides minimizing the cost of the award program, such sponsorship also enhances the prestige of winning the award. (MN)

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Project of the Month Award

John Hillison and Barbara J. Malpiedi

Unfortunately, not all vocational agriculture students are motivated to have the best possible supervised occupational experience for them. Some students are not motivated because they have limited opportunities. Some students are not motivated because they dislike keeping record books. Other students are slow to catch on to the advantages of having their own occupational experience program. Students who have started good supervised occuptional experience programs can use encouragement to have even better ones. Those who do not have S.O.E. programs can be encouraged to start one. The problem, however, appears to be one of motivation.

One possible solution to this motivational problem could be to recognize a project of the month. In departments with a small number of students it would be possible to recognize a departmental or chapter winner. In departments with large numbers of students it would be possible to recognize a winner in each class.

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Selection Criteria

The criteria for selecting the winner could very according to the needs and priorities of the department. The student who receives the highest grade for his or her recordbook could be the winner. Another possibility could be to have members of the departmental advisory council select the winner. It would be helpful for the advisory council if each project was summarized on a one page form. The form plus the students' project book should give the selection committee all of the information necessary.

Rewards

The reward program for the project of the month should be a meaningful one. High school age students generally enjoy competition with their peers. They also appreciate receiving publicity shared with their peers. A portion of the departmental bulletin board could be used to recognize each student who receives the project of the month award during the month it is received. A picture of the student plus one or two pictures of the winner's project could be on the bulletin board. The project pictures could be used later when the student enters in FFA proficiency awards competition.

The FFA reporter could write a brief article on each recipient. The article could be shared with the local newspaper, the school newspaper, and a local radio station. Such publicity will not only be good for the student, but it will also be good for both the department and FFA Chapter.

Material rewards such as ribbons and/or medals should be given to the project of the month recipients. These rewards could be part of the FFA chapter's program of activites for the committee on supervised agricultural occupational experience. It would be appropriate for that committee chair to recognize each recipient at the monthly FFA chapter meeting.

It is possible to extend the project of the month idea even further to the project of the year. The students who have received the project of the month can compete for the project of the year. The recipient of this honor should be recognized at the chapter parent-member banquet with an award such as a plaque and/or a cash prize. It is important that all such recognition be made in the presence of peers, friends, and relatives. The recipient of the project of the year award should also be recognized in the school yearbook.

Students who are rewarded with the project of the month and/or project of the year recognition will receive additional support for further competition. The notation of such recognition in a proficiency awards application or a state or American Farmer application can only enhance the applicant in the eyes of the review committee.

Sponsorship

All facets of the project of the month and the project of the year program could be sponsored. Potential sponsors include the local FFA alumni affiliate, a local civic organization, or a local agricultural business. While such a sponsorship minimizes costs, it enhances the prestige of winning the award. The sponsor

should be recognized as part of the publicity for the award and be asked to give the award to the winner.

Summary

While it may be challenging to motivate some students to have supervised occupational experience programs, it is not an impossible task. Motivation can occur with a reward system such as project of the month and project of the year. Once extrinsic rewards such as ribbons, medals, and plaques have been used to gain students' interest, it is very possible that maintaining the occupational experience program and even keeping records will become activities that have intrinsic value. When that occurs the students will have gained a great deal and teaching will be much more meaningful.